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SUBJECT: POSITIVE REACTION TO "LOBSTER SUMMIT"

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons: 1.4 (B/D).

11. (C) Summary. While extensive media coverage of the so-called "Lobster Summit" quickly gave way to euphoria over Russia's winning the right to host the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Moscow experts agreed that Putin demonstrated in Kennebunkport a desire to tone down the rhetoric and find ways to cooperate. Most attention focused on Putin's missile defense proposals and First Deputy PM Sergey Ivanov's subsequent threat to place new missiles in Kaliningrad if the GOR proposals were not accepted. Experts we talked to viewed Putin's missile defense initiative as serious and popular domestically, but contingent upon Washington at the very least slowing down negotiations with Poland and the Czech Republic. The fact that Kosovo did not feature prominently in the presidents' exchange has been pocketed as a Russian success in kicking the Ahtisaari plan further down the road. End Summary.

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GOOD VIBRATIONS

12. (SBU) Public reaction to the Summit was generally positive, with most Russian media highlighting the constructive atmosphere surrounding the meetings and stressing that Putin was received with extraordinary hospitality at the Bush family residence. Putin was portrayed as open to discussions on difficult issues like missile defense. Pre-meeting coverage had pitched the get together as a primarily an attempt to restore a level of civility to bilateral ties, so there were few expectations here that agreements would be reached on contentious issues. Kommersant was typical in observing that the presidents did not come to "any real agreement" on any pressing issue but had demonstrated that the relationship "had not deteriorated to the level of a new Cold War."

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GOR OFFICIALS ON MISSILE DEFENSE

13. (SBU) Publicly, GOR opinion makers concentrated on Putin's new offers on missile defense cooperation. First Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov received extensive coverage by stressing that U.S. acceptance of Russia's MD proposals would create a true "strategic partnership" between the U.S. and Russia. At the same time he cautioned that failure to reach agreement would lead Russia to "take adequate measures to ensure security" that involve an "asymmetrical and effective answer" involving in part the placement of missiles in Kaliningrad. Duma Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Konstantin Kosachev also flagged Putin's MD offer, characterizing the proposal as a "historic chance" that could lead to a breakthrough in U.S.-Russian relations. He was seconded by Federation Council International Affairs Committee Chair Mikhail Margelov, who said that Russia was demonstrating its readiness for a strategic partnership and that the MD offer was a "moment of truth" for bilateral ties.

14. (C) Our defense contacts characterized Putin's expanded offer to cooperate on missile defense as sincere, and not merely tactical. Editor of "Russia in Global Affairs" Feodor Lukyanov urged the U.S. to explore Putin's initiative, and argued that the medium-term nature of the Iranian threat should allow the U.S. to slow down decision making on the Czech and Polish sites. A "full steam ahead" approach on the European sites, he warned, would preemptively end strategic discussions with the GOR. Ivan Safranchuk, Chief Defense Analyst at the World Security Institute, agreed that Putin aimed to overcome Washington's perceived cool response to the Gabala radar station by inviting the EU and NATO to participate in his missile defense initiative. Like Lukyanov, Safranchuk stressed that Russia was eager to cooperate on MD, but remained adamantly opposed to the sites in Poland and the Czech Republic. Konstantin Eggert, Moscow's BBC correspondent, dismissed Sergey Ivanov's "threat" to deploy new missiles in Kaliningrad, as rhetoric driven by succession politics. At this point, Eggert maintained, Moscow was not interested in increasing international tensions or jacking up the anti-U.S. sloganeering.

15. (C) Both Eggert and Alexey Malashenko, a scholar at the Moscow Carnegie Center, told us that Putin scored points with the Russian public by portraying himself as a world leader who was trying to bring Europe, Russia and the U.S. under one cooperative defense system. Putin delivered a clear message that Russia will cooperate but made clear that the U.S. "should leave us alone domestically." In doing so, Eggert maintained that that Putin had gained the upper hand and

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placed the burden on Washington to prove that the U.S. was taking Russia seriously. Eggert argued that Washington needed to provide a thoughtful, considered response in order to convince the GOR and Russian public that it was serious about credible cooperation with Russia.

16. (C) Russian observers told us that the issue of Kosovo was striking by its presumed absence from any substantive exchange at the summit, with many such as Lukyanov arguing that it represented a victory for Russian efforts to kick the Ahtisaari plan further down the road. The GOR, Lukyanov told us, remains confident that the European Union is not ready to recognize a unilateral declaration by Kosovo of its independence. Having pocketed French President Sarkozy's suggestion of a six-month delay (while ignoring his condition of "automaticity" of the Ahtisaari plan), the GOR would continue to push for a delay beyond Russia's March 2008 presidential elections.

BURNS